



Characteristics of a Useful Evaluation Report:

A resource for Smaller Learning Community grantees and
third-party evaluators

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INTRODUCTION

Recipients of the United States Department of Education Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) grant must submit an evaluation report to the Department at the conclusion of each program year of the grant. Grantees should hire and work collaboratively with a third-party evaluator to assess their progress in achieving the grant's goals and objectives and use information gleaned from the evaluation process for improving their smaller learning communities. *Characteristics of a Useful Evaluation Report* was written to give the SLC evaluation team and SLC grantees broad pointers to writing an evaluation report that will serve as a helpful tool in the SLC continuous improvement process. *Characteristics of a Useful Evaluation Report* should serve as a companion piece to the *Essential Elements of an SLC Evaluation*¹, which lays out in detail the various aspects of conducting an SLC evaluation.

This document is not meant to be prescriptive; instead, it is intended to provide broad guidance that could prove useful when conducting the evaluation and writing the reports. This document is in response to feedback from many SLC grantees and their evaluators who have requested guidance in writing their evaluation report. Additionally, a review and cross-comparison of many of the reports submitted to the U.S. Department of Education over the past two program years allowed the Department to identify strengths and weaknesses in the evaluations and to develop criteria to make the evaluation more useful to school and district personnel.

There are four sections to this guide:

- I. Characteristics of a Useful Evaluation Report**
- II. Illustrative Examples of these Characteristics from Previous SLC Evaluation Reports**
- III. A Suggested Format for an SLC Evaluation Report**
- IV. SLC Evaluation Technical Assistance**

The examples used in this document have been excerpted from multiple SLC evaluation reports received by the Department of Education in 2005 and 2006 that illustrate attributes of a report that may be of particular use to grantees. Individual grantee or evaluator identifiers have been removed from the examples. The Department of Education does not endorse any particular evaluation firm or methodology. Rather, the examples contained here should be viewed as simply illustrative and informational for grantees and their evaluators.

¹ Essential Elements of an SLC Evaluation is located at <http://www.slcapr.com/District/whatisAPR.cfm>

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF A USEFUL EVALUATION REPORT

Introduction

The purpose of an SLC evaluation is to provide school personnel with information that will be useful in gauging their program's progress and in identifying areas for improvement. The primary audience for the SLC evaluation, and thus for the evaluation report, is the SLC grantee – the school(s) and school district, particularly the SLC Project Director and principal personnel managing the program. The evaluation report should reflect the collaborative nature of the actual evaluation and build off of the results from year-to-year. Frequent interaction between the evaluator and the rest of the evaluation team and open sharing and discussion of findings leads to evaluations that prove useful in improving the SLC program over time.

Reviews of previous SLC evaluation reports have revealed a number of characteristics that may increase their usefulness to school personnel.

A useful report:

- **Is effective in communicating to school personnel** – the prose is straightforward and easy to follow. Technical evaluation terminology is avoided; quantitative data are displayed in charts, graphs or other diagrams.
- **Compares grant goals and objectives with accomplishments** – the report states the grantee's goals and lays out the objectives in a clear and simple display and gives feedback on the extent to which each objective has been met.
- **Uses a variety of data** –
 - E.g., quantitative data on academic achievement and student behaviors, such as dropout rate, graduation rate, test scores, attendance, disciplinary referrals.
 - E.g., perceptual data from interviews, surveys or focus groups that capture information on attitudes, feelings and experiences.
 - E.g., trend data, such as comparing current year results with the pre-SLC Baseline Data Report and with previous grant years.
- **Uses charts and graphs to display data** – the report uses graphs or other diagrams to give a visual depiction of quantitative information, and avoids excessive use of tables of numbers. When done well, graphs enable the reader to make quicker meaning of the data and to generate ideas about causes and formulate possible courses of action.
- **Examines "Early Indicators" related to student outcomes** – the report recognizes and analyzes Early Indicators, which are data on achievements that provide a link to, and may be a predictor of, longer-term outcomes and ultimate goals. The evaluator identifies ways to improve performance on these indicators.

- **Provides feedback that is “actionable”** – the evaluator makes recommendations for improvement. There may also be practical or innovative suggestions on how report findings can be used.
- **Directs recommendations to specific audiences** – the evaluator makes separate recommendations for individual schools, and/or distinguishes recommendations for the district from those for the school(s).
- **Explains the evaluation approach/methodology** – the report describes how the evaluation was conducted. It explains the standards against which the grantee’s performance was assessed (which should be the grantee’s goals and objectives, but may also include a particular evaluation rubric the evaluator believes to be useful). It should include data sources, collection and analysis procedures. The description should reflect a collaborative approach between the evaluator and grantee.

II. ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

This section contains examples from past SLC evaluation reports to illustrate each characteristic of a useful evaluation report. Names of schools and districts are not the actual ones.

Please note that these examples are meant only to illustrate how the characteristics might be observed in an evaluation report--there is no "one size fits all" approach. Your evaluation should ideally reflect each of the characteristics of a useful evaluation report, but that reflection will look different in every report due to each SLC's unique situation.

CHARACTERISTIC A: EFFECTIVE IN COMMUNICATING TO SCHOOL PERSONNEL

EXAMPLE: A1

This example illustrates straightforward text. There is no evaluation jargon and readers can quickly get a grasp of what the evaluation did. Also, it lets the reader know immediately what the goals of the program were.

Introduction

The West Public School District was awarded a Smaller Learning Community grant in September 2003. Since that time Central Office administration, West High School faculty, administration, students and parents have been involved in the planning and implementation of the two major goals of this grant:

Goal 1: To improve performance and raise academic achievement of all students.

Goal 2: To create close, personal environments in which teachers can work collaboratively, and students have a sense of belonging.

This evaluation is based on how West High School has made progress toward achieving these goals in the time period from October 1, 2004 to October 1, 2005. The evaluator is limiting this evaluation to these two goals and the objectives stated in regard to each goal. This evaluation is based on a review of the 2005 State School Report Card data, disciplinary referrals, surveys given to staff and students and interviews with students, parents, faculty and administration. This evaluation will describe what has happened in the process of implementing this grant, the progress made, and recommendations to the West High School administration on what further steps need to be taken to fully accomplish the SLC grant goals.

EXAMPLE : A2

This is an example of a straightforward approach that provides a great deal of information succinctly, in an overview of the report. It lets the reader know what the goals of the SLC grant were and the salient findings of the first year in relation to the goals.

Introduction

In summer 2004 [the Evaluator], was contracted by Compass School District to conduct a three-year evaluation study of its Smaller Learning Communities. The evaluation includes an examination of the planning process, program implementation and administration, and student outcomes. This report presents findings from Year 1 of the SLC grant period (October 1, 2004-September 30, 2005). During this

evaluation period, grant activities included program planning and implementation of the Summer Bridge program.

Compass School District identified four primary goals that are aligned with the district's absolute priority- to help all students succeed through rigorous academic courses and remediation. The SLC goals are designed to move the district forward in its quest to increase student achievement and post-graduation preparation. Each goal is supported by measurable objectives that allow Compass School District to monitor its progress toward achieving its absolute priority.

Goal 1: Increase student achievement for 9th grade students.

Goal 2: Prepare all 9th grade students for educational opportunities in 10th, 11th, 12th grades and beyond.

Goal 3: Create safe, supportive learning environments for all 9th grade students.

Goal 4: Provide high quality, sustained professional development.

Salient Findings on Goals 1 and 4, Year 1

- Participation in Summer Bridge had a positive impact on student achievement. Students, on average, raised their mathematics score by one grade level (1.72) and raised their reading score by close to one grade level (.98).
- A majority of the Summer Bridge instructors participated in the automated instructional system in-service training and successfully integrated research-based teaching strategies and resources into the Summer Bridge academic program.
- The unavailability of instructional supplies and resources challenged the quality of program delivery.
- The District's intranet is not a reliable host to support the automated instructional system software.
- Technology problems posed a threat to the timely implementation and delivery of Summer Bridge academics.
- The partnership between Compass School District and the State Department of Employment Services must be reestablished with clear expectations and responsibilities for each party.
- Parental involvement strategies were not a part of the SLC Summer Bridge plan.

CHARACTERISTIC B: COMPARES GRANT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES WITH ACCOMPLISHMENTS

EXAMPLE: B1

This example illustrates how one evaluator summarized the year 1 progress on each of the school's objectives. It also shows the overall goal at which the objectives are directed. The reader can see at a glance those areas that need attention. Progress on each objective was also discussed in detail in another part of the report. The table below is extracted from a longer narrative in the Annual Performance Report, and shows how that information can be utilized for the evaluation.

Poplar High School Objective Status Table

The following chart summarizes Year 1 progress on the goals and objectives.

| SLC Goals and Objectives Status, 2003-2004 | |
|--|---|
| GOAL 1: Improve school climate -Create smaller, more personalized, safer high school learning environments where teachers, staff, students, parents, and community groups care for one another and work collaboratively to support student learning. | |
| Objective | Status |
| Objective 1A: Decrease the number of student violence by at least 5% per school year. | Met: In a comparison of 2002-03 and 2003-04 results, Poplar experienced a 73% decrease from 86 reports in 2002-03 to 24 reports in 2003-04. |
| Objective 1B: Decrease the number of incidents of alcohol and other drug use by at least 5% per school year. | Met: Reported incidents at Poplar decreased by 47 in 2003-04. |
| Objective 1C: Decrease the number of expulsions, suspensions, and disciplinary actions by at least 5% per school year. | Met: Poplar experienced a 32% decrease in the number of disciplinary actions in 2003-04. |
| Objective 1D: Increase the number of students and parents with positive attitudes toward school in general and course subjects by at least 20% per school year. | In Progress: Freshman Academy students and parents responded to a May 2004 survey containing 14 questions and a five-point likert scale designed to measure key stakeholder satisfaction. Results from Satisfaction Surveys completed in May 2004 will be used for comparison in Year 2. We will distribute an identical survey in April-May 2005. |
| Objective 1E: Increase the number of students with a reported sense of belonging by at least 20 % per school year. | In Progress: Freshman Academy students and parents responded to a May 2004 survey containing 14 questions and a five-point likert scale designed to measure key stakeholder satisfaction. Results from Satisfaction Surveys completed in May 2004 will be used for comparison in Year 2. We will distribute an identical survey in April-May 2005. |
| GOAL 2: Increase academic rigor and graduation rates - Strengthen educational expectations for our students to ensure that students attain their educational goals, earn their high school degrees, and leave high school knowing they are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully transition to a career or a post-secondary education. | |

| Objective | Status |
|--|---|
| Objective 2A: Increase the number of students taking courses for both high school and college credit by at least 5% per school year by the third year of the grant program. | Not Met: Poplar experienced a 10% decrease in the number of students enrolled in AP courses, which are only offered to juniors and seniors. However, the focus of the SLC grant in Year 1 is on the Freshman Academy. District administrators anticipate an increase in the number of students enrolled in AP classes in 2004-05 as the Upper School is implemented. |
| Objective | Status |
| Objective 2B: Decrease the school dropout rate by at least 5% per school year. | Met: The dropout rate from Poplar was decreased from 5.3% to 4.8% in 2003-2004. |
| Objective 2C: Increase the average daily attendance rate by at least 2% per school year. | Met: Poplar's attendance improved from 95.2% to 99.9% in 2003-04. |
| Objective 2D: Increase the number of students with stated plans to attend college or vocational school or become employed by at least 15 % per school year for the second and third years of the grant program. | In Progress: Reliable baseline data do not exist for this objective. Data from 2002-03 will be used as baseline data for comparison in Year 2. A review of school records, coupled with telephone and mail surveys will determine the number of, students enrolled in postsecondary education or who are employed. |

EXAMPLE : B2

This is an example of how one evaluator summarized first-year implementation results on one of the objectives for the SLC program. The objective was to increase the percent of students passing AP/IB by 10%. The evaluation report also contained a narrative description, but this table makes it easy for school personnel to see at a glance how well each school did on one of their objectives.

**Central School District
Students on Smaller Learning Communities Campuses Passing AP/IB End-of-Course
Examinations, 2002 and 2003**

| | | 2002 | 2003 | %Gain | Met Objective? | Comments |
|---------------|------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------------------|---|
| Beech | Students taking AP/IB exams | 22.2% | 27.3% | 23% | | Passing rate already about 90% |
| | Students passing AP/IB exams | 90.8% | 89.5% | -1% | NO | |
| Willow | Students taking AP/IB exams | 11.7% | 12.2% | 4% | | Gains in participation and passing rate, but <10% |
| | Students passing AP/IB exams | 39.8% | 42.4% | 7% | NO | |
| Maple | Students taking AP/IB exams | 13.2% | 11.3% | -14% | | Large gain in passing rate; smaller loss in participation |
| | Students passing AP/IB exams | 43.0% | 58.3% | 36% | YES | |
| Elm | Students taking AP/IB exams | 15.7% | 18.2% | 16% | | Lower passing rate but lower participation |
| | Students passing AP/IB exams | 51.4% | 45.7% | -11% | NO | |
| Palm | Students taking AP/IB exams | 11.4% | 10.9% | -4% | | Large gain in passing rate. |
| | Students passing AP/IB exams | 29.9% | 35.4% | 18% | YES | |
| Fir | Students taking AP/IB exams | 27.8% | 26.3% | -5% | | |
| | Students passing AP/IB exams | 54.6% | 69.4% | 27% | YES | Large gain in passing rate; smaller loss in participation |

CHARACTERISTIC C: USES A VARIETY OF DATA

EXAMPLE: C1

This is an example of how one evaluator described the different types of data sources used. The description is clear and brief, and hence easy for busy readers to absorb.

Methodology for Evaluation

[The Evaluator] has employed the following methods to assess the progress of SLC implementation at North High School:

1. Analysis of data submitted through the Annual Performance Report (APR) and other quantitative measures which describe the progress on objectives.
2. Review of May 23-25, 2005 Site Visit Report by Jane Jones and Sally Smith of Comprehensive Center Region VI, documents prepared by SLC project coordinators for the site visit, and Smaller Learning Communities Action Plan FY06 developed in December 2005 in response to site visit report.
3. Student focus groups conducted during site visit.
4. Survey design, administration and analysis. Along with the County Public Schools program evaluators, and SLC project coordinators, the external evaluator developed surveys that were administered to North High School faculty assigned to teams and all freshmen in May 2005. All surveys were anonymous with no names or identifiers. Designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data, surveys included statements/questions with rating scales and open-ended questions. [The Evaluator] analyzed the surveys and shared results with project staff. A summary of findings is presented in Section IV.

This report briefly describes North High School's SLC strategies, summarizes the survey findings from teachers and students, reviews site visit findings, analyzes the progress made on each of the project's objectives and draws conclusions regarding progress made during the first implementation year.

EXAMPLE: C2

One type of data that is particularly useful is trend data: it is important to understand the direction in which performance is moving – and whether you are getting closer to your goal or moving away from it. Where possible, a particular year’s results should be compared with those of the previous four or five years. This is an example of obtaining, displaying and discussing trends.

Percentage of Graduates Pursuing College Education

| YEAR | 95% Percentile | State Average | South High School |
|---------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 2001-02 | 95% | 71% | 69% |
| 2002-03 | 94% | 72% | 71% |
| 2003-04 | 95% | 73% | 82% |
| 2004-05 | 96% | 75% | 61% |

Conclusions: For the past several years, there has been quite a bit of growth in the percentage of South High School students who are pursuing college education. In 2002-2004, the percentage mirrored or exceeded the state average. However, the 2004-2005 school year saw a significant decrease.

Recommendations: As noted above, increased retention may be an explanation for dips in achievement indicators. However, the data should be reviewed regularly. Should the trend continue, it is recommended that South High School look beyond its freshman initiatives and develop strategies for supporting upperclassmen that show college potential. It is expected that, as students benefit from the implementation of SLC strategies, these indicators will improve.

CHARACTERISTIC D: EXAMINES “EARLY INDICATORS” RELATED TO STUDENT OUTCOMES

Early Indicators related to student outcomes are factors on which teachers and others in the school may be able to have an impact in the short term.

Early indicators are data on achievements that provide a link to, and may be a predictor of, longer-term outcomes and ultimate goals. They relate to various kinds of short-term improvements that are, or may be, connected to longer-term success. Following the principle of “start with the end in mind”, an SLC program should start by identifying its ultimate purposes, or goals. However, it may not be possible to capture the attainment of goals until after the program is completed. However, schools need to track accomplishments continuously during the life span of the SLC program in order to know if they are moving in a direction that will likely take them to their goals, and to be able to make mid-course corrections. This is where “Early Indicators” are useful.

The two examples below were taken from two different evaluation reports. Each is a good example of *the kind of statement that an evaluator can make using early indicators*. These statements indicate how these data can be used and applied at the school level.

EXAMPLE: D1

An apparent theme throughout the evaluation process was that teachers are feeling more effective in their instruction, particularly around the intervention they are providing to students who are struggling academically and socially...Early outcomes data suggests that these efforts are having an effect. SLC teaching teams put a great deal of effort into collecting information on students receiving “D” and “F” grades in core courses so that targeted intervention could be provided.

EXAMPLE: D2

Evaluators assisted Project Directors, Site Coordinators and school district staff in the collection and analysis of data on...near-term program implementation indicators (e.g., average daily attendance, tardiness rates, year-to-year retention)... Further, the evaluator developed tools specifically designed to help schools track early indicators ...The evaluator has developed three tools to assist schools in continuously monitoring the following three indicators: average daily attendance rates; students failing one or more classes; and disciplinary actions.

Potential Predictors of Improved Student Outcomes

Ideally, a number of early indicators would be used comprehensively to evaluate progress. Since the use of multiple early indicators is not exemplified by the excerpts above, the text box below provides more examples of types of early indicators.

EXAMPLES

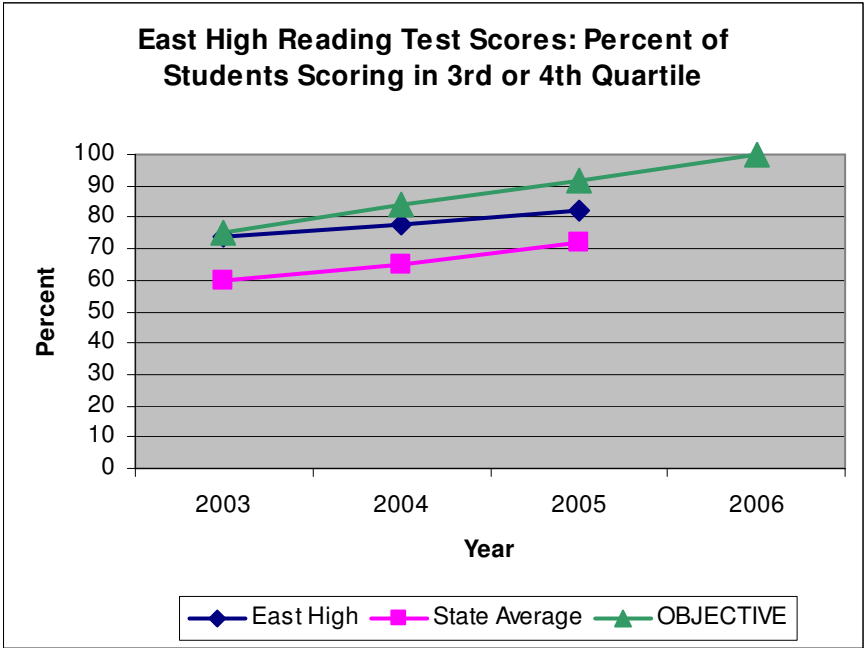
- Attendance (increased)
- Tardies (reduced)
- Disciplinary incidents (incidences of student violence; incidences of drug/alcohol use; suspensions; expulsions) (reduced)
- Course failure rate (% of students failing one or more courses) (reduced)
- Completed homework assignments percentage (increased)

- GPA (increased; by grade level)
- Honor roll (increased % of students)
- 9th to 10th grade transition rate (increase)
- Enrollment in AP/honors classes (increased % of students enrolled)
- Dual enrollments (increase)
- Reading levels (increase)
- Tutoring use rate (increased % of students making use of available tutoring)
- Test taking rate (course, AP/IB, district) (increased % of students taking test)
- Test scores (course, AP/IB, district) (by grade or student sub-group) (higher average score)
- Retentions at grade level (reduced)
- College course entrance requirements rate (increase in % taking required courses to meet entrance requirements)
- SAT/ACT test taking rate (increase)
- Credits earned (increase in average credits per student)
- College application rate (increase)
- College acceptance rate (increase)
- Scholarships # or dollar total (for the high school) (increase)

CHARACTERISTIC E:: USES CHARTS AND GRAPHS TO DISPLAY DATA

EXAMPLE: E 1

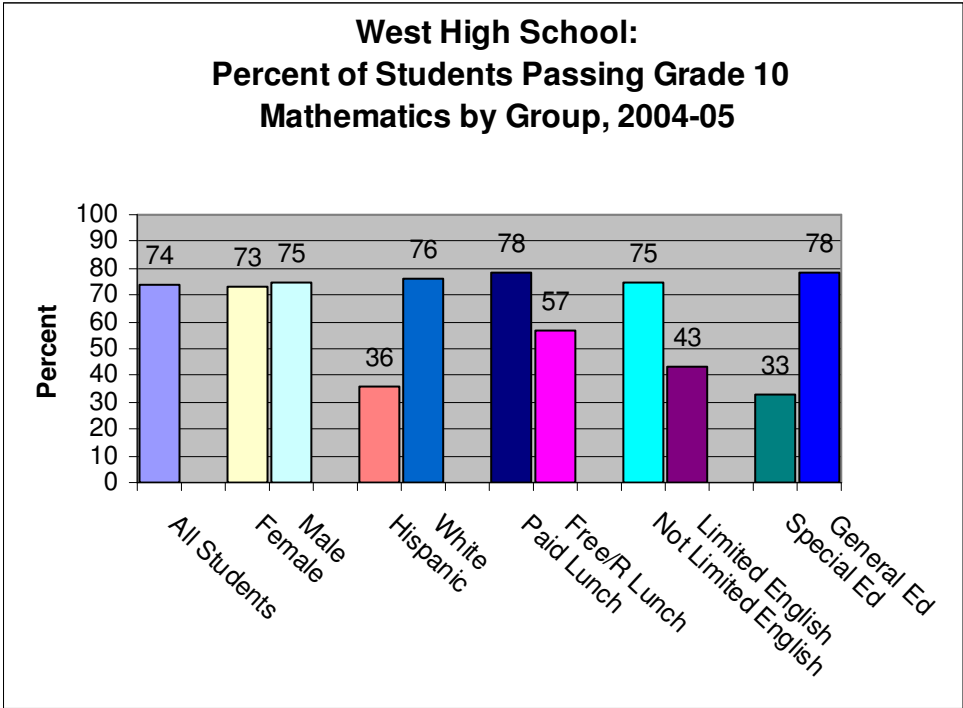
This is an example of effectively conveying a great deal of information in a picture, rather than in raw numbers and text – although text was also provided in this report. These line graphs show trend information, the school’s performance in comparison to its SLC Grant Objectives and in comparison to the state average.



CHARACTERISTIC E (CONTINUED): USES CHARTS AND GRAPHS TO DISPLAY DATA

EXAMPLE E2

This is an example of effectively communicating sub-group performance on state tests using bar graphs instead of a table of raw numbers.



CHARACTERISTIC F: PROVIDES FEEDBACK THAT IS “ACTIONABLE”

EXAMPLE: F1

This example illustrates how one evaluator provided detailed feedback that the school could act on. It also offers a context for understanding the early results of the program. (Note: This is an abbreviated list of recommendations from the actual report, not the entire list. But it provides an example of the depth and specificity of this evaluator’s recommendations).

Summary

The SLC grant project at South School has succeeded in making headway toward accomplishing their goals and objectives. Overall baseline benchmarks have been agreed upon by the evaluation committee for the measurement of the project's goals and objectives. The SLC project has been slowed in its implementation and there is a need to accelerate the rate of implementation. The evaluator recognizes the obstacles encountered in this first year of planning for this 2004-05 implementation year, but also recognizes a need for stakeholders to push forward during the second semester. The SLC's, collaboration time and advocacy groups are in place but are in the infancy of effective functioning.

The evaluator wants the stakeholders to understand that they are going through the normal change process as identified by Michael Fullan, a leading researcher on change in education settings. The SLC change project is in what Fullan calls the “implementation dip” where things get worse before they start getting better. This is the time in the change process that stakeholders feel ambiguity, uncertainty, anxiety, and are perplexed in how effective they are performing. Fullan states that the only way to avoid the “implementation dip” is not to adopt any new innovation in the first place. So, this “dip” is normal and just a phase of the change process that must be experienced and worked through. Fullan emphasizes that this is a time when skills and abilities of stakeholders need reinforcement and additional development.

Leaders of the change project must be open to those who are rejecting the change and allow them to voice their concerns. Leaders need to respond with support, encouragement and additional training where perceived by stakeholders. Stakeholders need to see realistic future plans and strategies to overcome the current perceived inadequacies. This future must be a “shared control” future and stakeholders need to be involved in planning the strategies to orchestrate the arrival at more desired state of implementation. This is the time for additional staff development, technical assistance and recognition of the accomplishments that have been made. Leaders need to apply pressure with support and reward those who do well. Problem-solving, hope and a positive vision of a better future are steps that need to be taken.

Recommendations

With the above scenario in mind, the evaluator offers the following recommendations for consideration:

1. Initiate a task force with a report date of March 1, to recommend how the class schedules could be changed to implement more “pure” SLC's for the next school year. “Hybrid” schedules need to be studied since more than 2/3 of the staff indicated on the February 13, 2004 survey that they wanted to consider the development of alternatives to the traditional schedule.

2. Develop a strategy for listening to staff members that are vocal in opposition to the changes. Reaffirm the commitment to the change but provide assistance and support for the concerns expressed. Implement the changes that can be done to help these resisters such as the agenda for advocacy groups being ready a week in advance.
3. For this current year, to make the collaboration time more effective, develop sub-groups of teachers within each SLC. This can be done by teachers giving the name of the student a week in advance of the collaboration meeting and the student's course schedule checked for common teachers before taking the student's name to collaboration.
4. Next year, attempt to have the collaboration time each week before the advocacy period.
5. Students need to be more involved in future planning and should be on all task forces.
6. The Evaluation Committee needs to meet on a quarterly basis to assess data collected rather than waiting until the end of the grant year. The Evaluation Committee should give verbal and/or written unofficial feedback on a quarterly basis to SLC leaders.
7. The Evaluation Committee needs to collectively examine all standardized test data in regard to pertinent sub-groups of students within the total population as specified in the No Child Left Behind requirements. Once this has been accomplished, baseline data figures for future comparisons need to be established for each sub-group.

EXAMPLE : E2

This is an example of detailed observations and specific recommendations that the school and the district can act on. (Note: This is an abbreviated list of recommendations from the actual report, not the entire list. But it provides an example of the depth and specificity of this evaluator's recommendations).

Recommendations

Based on the findings [the Evaluator] offers the following recommendations which it is hoped will assist West School in future program planning:

- **Add basic computer training for instructors to the SLC professional development goal**

Since integrating technology into the curriculum is a method the District employs to motivate student learning, ongoing computer training should be available to SLC instructors to ensure that they have enough confidence and working knowledge to assist students in the computer labs. It is recommended that West School conduct a survey of its SLC instructors to assess computer literacy. Survey results should be used to prioritize learning needs and develop ongoing computer professional development training. Training technologically competent teachers should be a goal of the SLC if the use of technology is to continue to be integrated throughout the 9th grade SLC curriculum.

- **Explore options for offering all students external incentives for participating in Summer Bridge**

Summer Bridge is a voluntary program and currently students have no incentive for participating in Summer Bridge. Consequently, their level of commitment to the program may be low. It is recommended that West School explore different incentives that the program may be able to offer students to encourage more students to volunteer to participate in the program. Such incentives could

include earning high school credit or retrieving credits not previously earned. Incentives should be such that all students have equal access to the incentives.

- **Develop a Summer Bridge Handbook for students and instructors**

Based on lessons learned during the first year of implementation, instructors, coordinators, and stakeholders are in the best position to document the best practices for moving forward. It is recommended that West School work with the stakeholders to develop a handbook for students that tells them about Summer Bridge and addresses the issues of accountability and expectations. It is also recommended that West School work with stakeholders to develop a teacher's handbook that outlines the instructional expectations, describes the Summer Bridge curriculum, training needs and expectations, length of commitment, and any other pertinent information stakeholders believe will assist teachers in making a smooth transition into their role in Summer Bridge.

- **Seek additional funding to provide instructional supplies, materials, and resources to the SLC-Summer Bridge**

The onsite coordinators reported that the District's SLC budget did not include a line item for Summer Bridge supplies, materials, or resources. It is recommended that the District seek funding through an additional grant or through an outside sponsor to develop a supply budget for each SLC. In order to provide the level of support needed to encourage teaching and learning, students and teachers should have access to instructional supplies and resources when needed, and before the beginning of the program. Funding should cover the costs of resources needed to implement all Summer Bridge strategies (e.g. field trips, guest speakers).

- **Review the evaluation plan for Year 2 with all SLC stakeholders**

It is recommended that the evaluator in collaboration with the District develop a data collection time line that tentatively details exactly when, where, and what data will be collected during Year 2. Where possible, data collection activities should be placed on the 2005-2006 academic calendars so that all stakeholders, for example, will know when focus groups are scheduled and when surveys will be administered. It is recommended that the evaluator meet with all SLC building stakeholders to review the time line in person and to answer any questions that arise. The meetings are to ensure that accurate information is communicated regarding data needs and that all stakeholders understand what data they are responsible for collecting and by when.

CHARACTERISTIC G: DIRECTS RECOMMENDATIONS TO SPECIFIC AUDIENCES

EXAMPLE : G1

This is an example of specific recommendations for individual schools.

North High School

- North High School (NHS) administrators should fully implement an Accelerator Week in summer 2005 for rising ninth graders identified as at risk for academic failure based on one or more of the following: low scores on the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) or State Basic Skills tests in reading and math during their middle school years; middle school guidance counselor assessments of behavioral issues.
- NHS should proceed with plans to for a Parent Advocate, to develop a series of workshops for parents of SLC students with the goal of providing information about and greater opportunities to parents for involvement in their child's educational journey. The Advocate's first task should be to survey parents regarding their needs and interests related to attending these workshops.
- NHS should proceed to implement strategies to support students at-risk for failure in core courses including: (1) acquiring a credit recovery system that will give students who have failed at least one core course the option to complete credits through a technology and performance-based online courseware system; (2) splitting the 90-minute freshman math and English blocks into two 45-minute sessions to enable incoming freshmen who scored in the lowest percentile on the CRCT to take year-long courses in Algebra and Freshman Literature and Composition.

South High School

- South High School (SHS) should fully implement a Freshman Focus class to assist Year 2 freshmen with the transition to high school covering topics such as good study habits, note taking, and other skills commonly associated with success in high school.
- The establishment of interdisciplinary teaching teams with common planning periods is a vital structural change that must be accomplished in Year 2.
- SHS should implement summer transition activities for rising ninth graders during summer 2005. Activities could include a Summer Survival Camp for students and an Open House for students and parents. Summer transition activities serve as a first step to help make the school feel smaller, which research indicates enhances school conditions and improves student outcomes (McPartland 2001).

EXAMPLE G2

This is an example of distinguishing recommendations for the schools from those for the district. (Note: This is an abbreviated list of recommendations from the actual report, not the entire list. But it provides an example of the depth and specificity of this evaluator's recommendations)

Recommendations to Schools

The primary focus of the SLC grant is on school-level structural change and strategies intended to include all students in SLCs by the end of the grant period. In addition to the structural changes noted above, [the Evaluator] makes the following recommendations for schools to implement during the 2004-05 school year.

- Develop a common focus for SLC and continue to build staff awareness and support for the initiative. Based on survey results, more than half (51 %) of staff either disagreed with or were unaware of the overall vision and mission for SLC at their schools. In 2004-05, many new SLC communities will be coming on board in all of the schools included in the evaluation resulting in a dramatic increase in the number of students enrolled in SLCs and staff assigned to work in SLCs. This provides a golden opportunity to bring on the staff who are not yet onboard and to demonstrate to them that the SLC initiative is here to stay. When schools can tip the balance in favor of a majority of teachers involved in the SLC initiative, it is likely to have more impact school-wide in terms of staffing, master schedule programming decisions and professional development.
- Make a solid connection between SLC and standards-based instructional reforms. Like the recommendation above, schools have substantial "marketing" to do among their own staff regarding the instructional basis of SLC reforms. With a relatively large proportion (approximately 25%) of staff indicating they did not know how connected SLC are with state content standards and standards-based reforms generally, 2004-05 is the year to solidify that connection and understanding on a school wide basis. Staff must be shown how and why SLCs will deepen standards-based instruction by providing personalized, relevant pedagogy to a wide proportion of students. Unless this connection is made, SLCs may lose the support of key staff and leaders at the school.
- Build in time for SLC teams. The survey results indicate that time for SLC team collaboration is in short supply. With some of the time set aside for professional development taken up by overall and school-wide planning of the SLC initiative and the remaining time taken up by district-mandated-professional development, there has been little time for SLC teams to collaborate and plan for their individual programs. Survey data indicates that staff would like more time for planning SLC activities, curricula, and strategies for providing personalized counseling and guidance support to students. Going forward, schools will need to balance time for SLC team collaboration with time for departmental collaboration, in addition to balancing whole staff and smaller group sessions for professional development.
- Connect the SLC initiative's emphasis on personalized instruction to a broader delivery of counseling and guidance. Student survey results collected as part of this evaluation point up challenges in student access to regular counseling and guidance during high school. Approximately one-third (34%) had worked with a counselor (34%) or teacher (39%) to develop a written educational plan. Fewer students (28%) indicated they talked regularly to a teacher or counselor about their high school plan. On average, only 22% considered themselves to be assigned

to a teacher or other staff member to help the plan their education in high school and prepare for life after they graduate and only 13% indicated that they had met with a counselor to plan for college. In sum, the SLC initiative at each school can and should address the insufficiency of proactive counseling and guidance by providing personalized instruction and regular interactions between students and faculty and other staff regarding high school success, postsecondary planning, and career preparation. Schools must implement systems and provide time and preparation for teachers and others at the school to fulfill this function.

Recommendations to the District

At the District-level, the SLC initiative requires a commitment to on-going technical assistance, training, and support in areas of SLC implementation that the schools are ill-equipped to resolve on their own. In order to provide direction for the coming school year, [the Evaluator] makes the following recommendations for the Countywide District to implement through the central district with follow-up support and oversight exercised by local districts.

- Provide technical assistance and guidance on developing Master Schedules tied to SLC implementation. In order to sustain the growth of SLCs, the Master Schedule is the key school structure for which schools need support. Schools need technical support on how to develop a Master Schedule which simultaneously meets SLC objectives for coherent interdisciplinary teams, common planning time, and shared students with the host of instructional demands, compliance mandates, and concerns about maintaining equity and access.
- Provide technical assistance and professional development on how to integrate SLC autonomy and innovation with District curricular mandates. SLCs require teachers and administrators to engage in entrepreneurial and creative approaches to interdisciplinary and applied curriculum and instruction that is based more on student need than a prescribed "one-size-fits-all" approach. Without guidance, it is possible that SLC reforms will be viewed as conflicting with District-mandated instructional guides specifying pacing and periodic assessments. Providing information and support to teachers and SLC teams on how they can simultaneously provide interdisciplinary and personalized instruction that meets the mandates associated with standards alignment and pacing of curriculum as well as assessment reforms will become increasingly essential as SLCs involve more staff and students at each school.
- Assist schools in modifying site-based information data systems to allow schools to extract and examine data by SLC. While all can agree that educators should make decisions that are informed by student achievement data, all but one of the schools included in this evaluation have been unable to adapt the existing site-based student information system to meet the needs of SLC implementation by flagging student records by SLC. While the District is developing a new system for data management at the site-level, schools need assistance now on how to effectively use existing systems to code and track student achievement by SLC. As more students participate in SLCs, the SLC identifiers become crucial to how accurate the analyses of student outcome will be in describing SLC impact. Moreover, unless data of this sort are available, school decision-makers and leaders of SLCs will be hard-pressed to differentiate instruction and deliver academic intervention tied to needs of students enrolled in each SLC.

CHARACTERISTIC H: EXPLAINS THE EVALUATION APPROACH/METHODOLOGY

EXAMPLE : H1

This is an example of a clear description of the evaluation approach and it provides a good description of each of the data sources.

Methodology

Data for this report came from several sources. The Department of Program Evaluation provided survey data from each campus as well as testing, attendance, discipline, demographic, AP, and college entrance exam data. Data from the Academic Excellence Indicator System located on the State Education Agencies website included student achievement data from state issued tests as well as demographic data for students, faculty, and staff. Site facilitators at each campus, program staff, and internal evaluation staff were interviewed. Additionally, supporting documents, such as the grant application and other reports were provided as background information.

Wherever possible, data from several sources were incorporated in the analysis. This provided a way to examine the validity of the data and at the same time, accommodate divergent viewpoints. A brief description of the data elements is given below. Additionally, we used a multi method approach that increased confidence in the findings, and created a richer, more integrated picture of the project and its outcomes.

High School Exit Surveys

The Beech High School Exit Survey was administered electronically to seniors in every District high school during the sprint of 2005. The survey is organized into four general topics: School Climate, High School Experiences, Postsecondary Intentions and Postsecondary Preparation. Participation rates in all three schools ranged from 77% to 92%. See Appendix A for response rates for each high school and for rankings of each campus on these dimensions.

Parent Surveys

The Parent Survey was given to all schools in the district. Campuses were asked to make the survey available to all parents. Paper and online surveys were made available to parents in English, Spanish and Vietnamese. Parents were asked to fill out one survey for each child they had attending a [District] school. Parents gave feedback about their experiences with staff, opinions about testing and school safety, and the types of information the school had provided. Composite scores were created for the following dimensions: Parent Involvement, Treatment of Stakeholders, Providing Information and School Safety.

District Academic, Discipline, Budget and Attendance Data

The [District] maintains a large and comprehensive database of school and district information. Staff in the Department of Program Evaluation provided campus and district data for the 2004-05 school year. Data elements provided consisted of: demographics; budgetary information; enrollment figures; achievement data; attendance, graduation and dropout rates; levels of AP course taking; and data on disciplinary incidents. These data were used to examine where each campus is in relation to goals set out in SLC grant.

State Education Agency Data

The [State Agency] also maintains a large database of school and district information. The [State Agency] data used in this report come from the Academic Excellence Indicator System and included:

student achievement data, attendance rates and demographic information about students and campus staff. This information can be accessed at: [url].

Document Analysis

[District] Program Evaluation staff, the SLC program manager and campus staff provided supporting documents, such as grant applications, existing district and campus reports and relevant literature. These documents were examined by the evaluator and provided background information relevant to the SLC project.

EXAMPLE : H2

This is an example of a detailed description of the evaluation approach and methodology. The original text is several pages long; parts have been excerpted and displayed in this example.

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation of [the school district's] SLC grant encompasses two dimensions: (1) a quantitative dimension measuring the impact of the grant on student achievement and (2) a qualitative dimension measuring progress with regard to program implementation. The evaluation is an annual process over the three-year grant cycle.

The quantitative component of the baseline evaluation report (see Section IV) focuses on preparing to answer the following two research questions, related to grant goals, over the three-year grant period:

1. To what extent has the implementation of SLCs improved student achievement?
2. To what extent has the implementation of SLCs increased student eligibility and preparation for postsecondary education and careers?

The qualitative component of the evaluation report (see Section III) summarizes SLC implementation focusing on the following five research questions related to implementation objectives:

1. To what extent has the implementation of SLCs modified the delivery of curricula and instruction?
2. To what extent has the personalization of instruction at the heart of SLCs benefited students?
3. To what extent has the implementation of SLCs improved school safety?
4. To what extent has the implementation of SLCs engaged and involved parents, business and community members?
5. What kinds of technical assistance and/or support are needed to effectively implement SLCs at large, urban high schools?

The primary data collection methodologies used for the analysis contained in this first-year report are:

- A review of the literature related to SLC implementation
- Staff and student surveys
- Site visits to each high school receiving an SLC grant
- Quantitative data analysis at baseline (2002-2003) comparing SLC to non-SLC student achievement

This report next provided full descriptions of the evaluator's methodology concerning literature review, surveys, site visits and quantitative data analysis, which are omitted here for brevity sake. Excerpts from the section on quantitative "Data Collection and Analysis" follow:

...Student level data from 2002-03 for all students at the five schools participating in the SLC grant were collected from the District's Research Department in Spring of 2004 with additional data obtained from each school's Report Card and/or data available online through the State Department of Education. Section IV of this report summarizes baseline achievement data across the five SLC high school grantees in the District. Data for each individual school are presented in Appendix E of this report...

...The data set included student-level indicators of student achievement (e.g., State Standards Test results, State High School Exit Exam results, and pupil attendance) as well as postsecondary preparation (state college prep curricula taken and AP course enrollment and pass rates) obtained primarily from the District Research Department. In addition, the student-level data included demographic characteristics for each student. The demographic data allowed us to examine subgroup differences among students linked to ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, as well as for students identified as special education or gifted and talented...

III. SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR SLC EVALUATION REPORT

There are many ways to structure your evaluation report so that it is easy-to-follow and a useful tool in helping strengthen your SLCs. Below is a possible format that helps ensure that the important information from the SLC evaluation is included in the evaluation report. A well-conducted evaluation and a well-written evaluation report can be extremely useful to the broad group of people who are interested in the SLC's progress—teachers, principals, district administrators etc; and excerpts from the report can be powerful communication tools with parents, students and other stakeholders. Keep in mind that the Department of Education has no strict requirements on the format of the evaluation report. The format below is simply one possible way to go about it.

1. **Executive Summary.** The executive summary is a short document that sums up the SLC evaluation for the reader. It should be able to stand alone, so that a busy person can read only the summary and grasp the salient findings. In addition to key findings and recommendations, it should include the grant goals and objectives and should indicate what district/schools were evaluated.
2. **Background/Introduction.** This section sets the context for why the district/school pursued the grant (the need) and the goals and objectives of the SLC program that the grantee developed to meet that need. It also lays out the implementation strategy and timing for the SLC.
3. **Findings/Results.** This section describes evaluation findings using text, charts, graphs, and tables—a variety of methods to help make understanding and interpretation as easy as possible. If there are applicable connections from the field of educational research, the Evaluator can bring in those observations for an additional perspective on the findings.
4. **Analysis/Discussion.** This section interprets the evaluation findings against the project goals and objectives. If the SLC achieved what it wanted, or if it didn't, this section asks, why, to determine the contributing factors to what is working and what is not. It discusses any limitations in the findings and methods.
5. **Recommendations.** This section makes recommendations, based on the analysis, for the grantee to use to improve SLC structures and strategies to improve student achievement. The recommendations should be sufficiently specific that the grantee can take action based on them. There may also be practical or innovative suggestions on how report findings can be used.
6. **Evaluation Approach/Methodology.** This section lays out how the evaluation was conducted. It should reflect a collaborative process between the evaluator and the school. It covers topics such as: data sources how data and information were collected (administrative records at school or district level, observation, survey, focus groups, etc.) and other information about the approach that would be of interest to teachers, administrators or other stakeholders.
7. **Appendices.** The appendices include data collection instruments and potentially other documents that were important to the evaluation but did not fit into the body of the report.

IV. SLC EVALUATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

There is additional assistance available to you, should you have questions about conducting your SLC evaluation or writing your SLC evaluation report.

There is a new online tutorial that walks you through SLC evaluation at <http://slcp.ed.gov/tutorials/evaluation/index.cfm>. The tutorial provides you with everything you need to know about the SLC evaluation in four easy to navigate main sections: Getting started, the basics, school stories, and tools.

Additionally, Visionary Integration Professionals, is the evaluation technical assistance provider for the SLC program. Feel free to contact them with any evaluation questions by calling the help desk at (703) 647-1655 or emailing SLCPSupport@vipconsulting.com.